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Security Council

Seventieth year

Provisional

7493rd meeting
Tuesday, 28 July 2015, 10.25 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Van Bohemen	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gimolieca
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Olguín Cigarroa
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Jordan	Mrs. Kawar
	Lithuania	Mr. Baublys
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Klein
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Méndez Graterol

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/561)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/561)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Security Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/561, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: Greatly to my regret, my inaugural statement to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria continues where my predecessor left off, chronicling yet another month of grim statistics to convey the horrors of a brutal conflict and the immense suffering of beleaguered civilians, particularly women, children, the elderly and those living with disabilities.

What began in Syria as unrest in March 2011 has been transformed into a war characterized by a complete failure to protect civilians, generating gargantuan levels of suffering for most civilians. Since the adoption of resolution 2139 (2014), almost 18 months ago, each of the Secretary-General's reports have detailed the widespread violations of international humanitarian law and the inability or unwillingness of all parties to uphold their basic minimum legal obligations. The latest report (S/2015/561) is no different and comes, depressingly, as no surprise, highlighting how much worse the situation has become for so many civilians across Syria. There are 12.2 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance today. It is estimated that some 220,000 people have been killed in Syria since the start of the conflict.

Violence has continued to escalate across the country in recent weeks, causing death and destruction and complicating and severely impeding brave aid efforts. Indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks by all parties to the conflict, including through the use of barrel bombs and other explosive weapons in populated areas, remain by far the primary cause of civilian deaths and injuries. Not even residential neighbourhoods or places of community life — public markets, schools, hospitals and places of religious worship — are immune to attack. In the face of such violent, indiscriminate onslaughts, it is simply not difficult for any of us to feel what it must be like for the Syrian people, community by community. As the Council can imagine, it is the worst of all choices — either flee or be killed.

In early June, 60 civilians were killed and 120 injured when missiles were fired on the central market of Janudiyah, west of Idlib city. Later that month, nine civilians, including six from one family, were killed when mortar rounds from a non-State armed group hit the heart of a shopping area in the city of Damascus. In late June, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device near a mosque in Al-Tal, in rural Damascus, killed 14 civilians just after evening prayers had concluded. Attacks on medical facilities continued, with 14 recorded in June, 12 of them from air strikes. Such attacks further degrade the capacity to provide medical care when and where it is most needed, and blatantly ignore the special protection afforded to medical facilities and personnel under international humanitarian law. Over the past several weeks, the Government of Syria and allied forces have pressed their attack on Zabadani in rural Damascus, leading to an unprecedented level of destruction and deaths among civilians. At the same time, non-State armed groups have threatened to overrun two Government-held villages near Idlib city, Kefraya and Foah. I remain extremely concerned about the 15,000 civilians caught in the middle of the fighting in those areas. Regarding the deaths I just mentioned, I do not have the precise number, and since it has not been verified and I have focused today's statement totally on incontrovertible facts, I am therefore not able to give that number.

Intense fighting across the country has also caused a surge in displacement. Considerably more than 100,000 people fled the southern areas of Hasakah city following the advances of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) last month. In Raqqa governorate, more than 70,000 had to flee as fighting escalated

between ISIL and non-State armed groups. In southern Syria, more than 40,000 fled Dar'a city following an offensive launched on it by non-State armed groups. Altogether, more than 1 million people have been displaced from their homes in 2015 so far, many for the second or third time, and those in addition to the 7.6 million who were already internally displaced as of the end of 2014.

Another tragic milestone was recorded when the number of registered refugees reached 4 million in early July, the largest refugee population from a single conflict worldwide in more than a quarter of a century. I commend the neighbouring countries which shoulder this extraordinary burden with remarkable generosity and hospitality, despite the destabilization it brings. The members of the international community must do more to support these refugee-hosting countries, as well as themselves receiving a higher share of those seeking safety.

The parties to the conflict continue deliberately to cut essential services to civilians. In July, non-State armed groups cut the water supply in Aleppo city, affecting some 1.7 million people. Such acts, which are clear violations of international humanitarian law, serve only to worsen humanitarian conditions. Overall, water availability has been reduced by half around the country since the start of the conflict. Many people have only sporadic access for a few hours per day. The lack of access to clean water has resulted in a significant increase in water-borne diseases during the hot summer months, with thousands of cases of acute diarrhoea, hepatitis A and typhoid reported, as families can drink only unsafe water.

More broadly, the relentless conflict in Syria is gradually destroying the country's social and economic fabric, eroding the development gains made over several generations: 80 per cent of people living in poverty; rampant food insecurity amid rising prices; degradation of vital infrastructure and limited access to basic services; and families and community networks destroyed. Neither should we lose sight of the immeasurable human impact of the crisis, the trauma and emotional toll on civilians, particularly young people, too long exposed to living in a climate of violence and fear. This will have profound implications for generations to come. A child born in 2011, entering school this year, will know only war. With the bombing of schools and the fear experienced by young people, this is producing a completely lost generation of educated Syrians, which bodes ill for the future we all hope Syria will one day start rebuilding.

Despite the difficult environment, United Nations organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating from within Syria and from neighbouring countries support millions of people in need using all available modalities, including across borders pursuant to resolution 2165 (2014), which the Security Council united behind. In the first months of 2015, United Nations agencies and NGOs provided food assistance to 5.8 million people per month, medicine and supplies for nearly 9 million treatments, and water and sanitation support for almost 5 million people; and it provided basic relief items such as blankets and other necessities of life for nearly 3 million people.

With unimpeded access, imagine how many more millions could be reached.

But access is severely restricted, and, of course, to make a difference, it is vital that humanitarian organizations have the resources necessary to do their critical work. The response plan for Syria is only 27 per cent funded. I thank donors for their generous contributions so far and urge them and others to step up their financial support to the humanitarian response effort. Until there is a political settlement, humanitarian needs will only grow.

The courageous efforts of humanitarians to reach people with assistance should not hide the fact that widespread fighting, shifting conflict lines and intentional obstacles and restrictions put in place by all parties continue to significantly hinder the delivery of aid to people in need in Syria. Seventy-seven humanitarian workers have been killed since the start of the conflict. A total of 32 United Nations staff members, 28 of whom are United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East staff, continue to be detained or are missing.

Some 4.6 million people, around a quarter of the country's population, live in areas that remain extremely hard to reach for humanitarian actors. Of these, some 422,000 people are in areas that remain besieged by the parties. These people remain largely cut off from assistance and face a daily struggle to survive. In June, humanitarian actors were able to bring assistance only in one besieged area following an airlift of World Health Organization medical assistance to areas of Deir ez-Zor city, besieged by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. That is less than 5 percent of people in besieged

areas. No other type of United Nations assistance was permitted into any other besieged area during June.

United Nations organizations and partners delivered medical supplies and treatments to more than 4 million people in June, including over 350,000 treatments across conflict lines. But there were some areas where these items were prevented from being delivered, including to Talbiseh, in Homs governorate, where life-saving medical and surgical items were removed from aid convoys by Government authorities.

Some progress was made when the Government approved an additional number of inter-agency convoys in June. However, 45 convoy requests, including 33 made on 1 July, remain pending, and I call upon the Government of Syria to positively consider and grant these requests. At a time when needs are deepening, we must have rapid, sustainable access to deliver essential humanitarian items to all people in need, in all parts of the country, without delay or hindrance. It is the obligation of all parties under international humanitarian law to facilitate this.

In advance of my proposed visit to Damascus next month, I can only report on the verified facts, but the facts speak for themselves. I am shocked and outraged; Syria today — among, sadly and appallingly, an enlarging pool of humanitarian need and human misery across many parts of the world, but notably in this region — is the most acute, unrelenting and shameful blot on the world's humanitarian conscience.

I hope that my proposed visit to Damascus next month will provide an opportunity to constructively engage with the Government to address some of the significant access challenges that seriously impede humanitarian operations and prevent ordinary Syrians from getting the assistance they so desperately need.

Carving out space to meet the humanitarian needs of Syria's people is today's imperative. But, as we have said repeatedly to the Council, there are no humanitarian solutions to this crisis. Each day that passes without the parties upholding their most basic obligations to protect civilians, and the strong demands of the Council, results only in more lives lost; more people displaced; more people without access to basic services; and a generation of children who struggle to obtain an education or have any sense of a future for themselves. It is their innocent voices and their suffering that need advocating, as indeed it is my mandate, and thus that of all of us within the United Nations, to do.

A political solution is more urgent than ever to end this futile, hopeless cycle of brutality and violence. We must show the people of Syria that the world has not forgotten them or the plight of their country. I urge the Security Council to consider its options through their eyes, the eyes of the beleaguered, now long-suffering Syrian people.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.